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**AUTHOR** Weber, Michael R.  
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**ABSTRACT**

The paper describes Wisconsin's project STRIVE (Sheboygan Area Treatment for Reintegration Through Involvement in Vocation and Education) designed to serve emotionally disturbed juvenile delinquents. In this self-contained program, students receive instruction in academics, career development, appropriate behavior, and peer interaction. Interagency cooperation is stressed in a highly controlled setting that emphasizes caring, compassion, control, confrontation, and community. An outdoor challenge component stresses self-reliance in difficult situations and an awareness of the need for group cooperation. Ongoing counseling and evaluation are also central features of the program which has resulted in decreased numbers of students in correctional institutions, decreases in school dropouts, reduced expenditures on institutionalization, and a more positive community attitude toward delinquents. (CL)

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*by Michael R. Weber*

March, 1985

DEPARTMENT OF PUPIL SERVICES

"STRIVE"

■ TELEPHONE (414) 459-3329

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES ■ 830 VIRGINIA AVENUE  
SHEBOYGAN ■ WISCONSIN 53081

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**EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY:**

**EVERYONE'S PROBLEM WHICH MUST BE ADDRESSED**

**THROUGH INTERAGENCY COOPERATION**

One of the most challenging groups of handicapped students is emotionally disturbed adolescents. The task of educating these students in the areas of academics, career development, appropriate social behavior, and maintenance of emotional stability becomes exceedingly more difficult when the students are involved in juvenile delinquent acts within the community.

Juvenile delinquent emotionally disturbed students possess needs which cannot be fully addressed within the confines of the school. They and their parents are in need of support and assistance in the community as they sort their way through the juvenile justice system. Most school personnel do not understand the system and are not prepared to provide much assistance. Juvenile justice personnel do not understand the significance of the unique emotional, social, and educational problems facing emotionally disturbed offenders. The end result is that of several major community agencies, e.g., department of social services; youth services bureau; and the school district, working independently of each other and in many cases conflicting with each others' efforts. This lack of communication, cooperation, and understanding directly contributes to many emotionally disturbed students becoming confined to correctional facilities. There is a more effective and less expensive method of serving the needs of emotionally disturbed adolescents in school, their homes, and the community as demonstrated in the five year history of the Sheboygan, Wisconsin inter-agency STRIVE (Sheboygan Area Treatment for Reintegration Through Involvement in Vocation and Education) Program.

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The STRIVE Program began operating in January of 1980, after three years of joint planning between the Sheboygan Area School District, Sheboygan County Social Services, Sheboygan County Unified Board, Sheboygan County Handicapped Children's Education Board, Youth Services Bureau, and the Sheboygan Police Department. In brief, the STRIVE Program is a self-contained complete program for emotionally disturbed adolescents housed in the School District's central office building. Ninety-seven percent of the students are juvenile delinquents as well as emotionally disturbed and are served by five teachers certified in the area of emotional disturbance, eight aides, four social workers, one secretary, one social worker supervisor I, and a special education administrator.

The students receive instruction in academics; career development; appropriate school, home, and community behavior; and peer interactions. No behavior is ignored (positive or negative). During each class period, lunch break, before and after school, and in the hallway; students are evaluated on their cooperation, attitude, appropriate behavior, social interactions, participation, and completed work. Students earn points toward reintegration into regular school programs and shopping trips.

Daily attendance is mandatory, and students are transported on buses with the STRIVE staff. The ride is a counseling session on wheels. If a student runs away or refuses to come to school, the STRIVE staff and the police department locate the student and escort him/her to school. The student then remains at STRIVE until all work is completed and his/her attitude is appropriate, which includes overnight if necessary.

The social workers meet with the families on a regular basis and represent the students in juvenile court. An educational, community, and home improvement plan is formulated by teachers, social workers, parents, and law enforcement personnel; and it is presented to the judge during juvenile hearings. The end result is a comprehensive interagency twenty-four hour program for emotionally disturbed delinquent students within their home community.

After five years of operation, there is a significant reduction in the number of Sheboygan County adolescents in correctional institutions; a reduction in school dropouts; less money being spent on institutionalization and more being spent on local community efforts; an increase in interagency cooperation and understanding; and a more positive community attitude toward delinquent adolescents. The Program is now being expanded through the formation of a four tier career development program involving the Sheboygan Area Private Industry Council, drug and alcohol abuse instruction/intervention, outward bound/stress challenge education, GED instruction, expanded physical development, and more intensive family therapy.

We believe that an interagency program such as STRIVE is the key to helping many troubled young people through communication, cooperation, and understanding. Even after five years, this continues to be a difficult task, but a necessary one. We are committed to an expansion of our program and will continue to share our successes and failures with other school districts and community agencies.

About the Author: Michael Weber is the STRIVE Administrator/Ass't. Director of Special Education for the Sheboygan Public Schools, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, (414) 459-3329.

Mr. Weber has been involved in eight interagency programs as an educational administrator. He has a masters and specialist degree in educational and business administration and is presently working on a Ph.D. in urban education at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.

### STRIVE Slide Program Narrative

Sheboygan, Wisconsin is a clean, neat community, with a reputation as a good place to raise a family. However, Sheboygan like other cities of its size, is not immune to many of the serious urban problems common to larger metropolitan areas. Juvenile delinquency is one of these problems; one which affects all areas of community life.

In recent years, two out of every three persons arrested in the City of Sheboygan were juveniles. Recognition of the great cost of dealing with juvenile problems, both in human and monetary terms, led to the creation of STRIVE.

STRIVE is a unique interagency program, utilizing the joint services of many agencies in the community. Through a cooperative effort, it provides an alternative to incarceration or placement in mental health treatment centers. STRIVE meets the educational, personal, social and pre-vocational needs of emotionally disturbed youngsters who are alleged or adjudicated to be juvenile delinquents. STRIVE deals with emotionally disturbed young people with serious community problems such as police records for assault, theft, and shoplifting; and histories of alcohol or other drug abuse; and indications of emotional disturbance. For most, STRIVE is their last alternative before institutionalization.

Placement of students in the highly controlled setting of the STRIVE Program comes only after a careful and thorough screening process. The first step is taken by a case worker, guidance counselor, or any other concerned adult who encounters a youngster who is exhibiting serious disruptive behavior in school, at home or in the community. Parental permission for an evaluation is obtained when a school social worker meets with the parents to discuss the youngster's behavior problems. Once parental permission is given, school and community specialists conduct an extensive screening and evaluation. The referral and evaluation information must be reviewed by both a special education Multi-Disciplinary Team and by the STRIVE Case Review Committee before a student is placed in the program.

Upon their approval, the student and his or her parents are invited to an Intake Conference with the Coordinator of Special Education and the STRIVE administrator. The student and parents are given a tour of the STRIVE classrooms and facilities, and the program is thoroughly explained. In addition, STRIVE rules and disciplinary measures are carefully reviewed. Parents are asked to sign an informed consent form agreeing to both the rules and the placement of their child in the STRIVE Program.

STRIVE is administered according to five basic principles: Caring, Compassion, Control, Confrontation, and Community. STRIVE exerts a great deal of external control on a student's environment and actions. The school day begins at the door of the student's home. Staff members travel on the school bus, greeting each student warmly and enthusiastically at the beginning of each day. The bus ride often becomes a counseling session on wheels; a time for the youngster to talk about any problems and concerns.

Most students in the STRIVE classrooms exhibit large gaps in their academic development which are a result of long records of truancy or disruptive behavior in school. The STRIVE academic program provides small classes and an individualized curriculum with stress on building fundamental skills. Physical activities are also a major component of the STRIVE curriculum. Local facilities have been made available by the YMCA and the school district for a variety of physical education activities. This constructive use of energy provides students with a sense of personal accomplishment and pride. Through these activities, students learn that competition and cooperation can go hand in hand.

"Outdoor Stress Challenge" plays an important role in STRIVE; teaching both self-reliance in difficult situations and an awareness of the need for group cooperation. For youngsters used to "taking the easy way out," Outdoor Challenge provides an opportunity to tackle adversity and win, building confidence through success. With the acquisition of additional equipment, the Outdoor Challenge component of



STRIVE is being expanded to provide a progression of increasingly demanding opportunities for personal growth.

Counseling of students in the STRIVE Program is an ongoing activity, both in one-to-one sessions and in groups. Emphasis is placed on helping students realize that they have a choice of decisions in every situation they encounter. The consequences of these decisions, good or bad, are clearly outlined, and the student is encouraged to make appropriate choices.

Counseling services are also extended to parents of youngsters enrolled in STRIVE, with home visits by staff members scheduled on a regular basis. Social service and mental health workers on the STRIVE staff work with parents who, in many cases, had given up all hope of ever having normal relationships with their troubled children. Parental counseling can ease some of the pressures on both student and family which have resulted in delinquent behavior. The staff also provides a 24-hour a day "hot line" every day of the year, so that parents and students can call at any time if a serious problem arises.

All student behavior in the STRIVE Program is constantly evaluated by the staff. Evaluation sessions are held at the end of each class period (seven times a day) with the staff and fellow students giving both positive and negative feedback to each student. Ratings, with 5 the highest score, are posted on the classroom board as a reinforcement and reminder. A perfect score of 35 in one day earns a "good conduct" letter to take home to parents, along with a small reward for the student. STRIVE disciplinary measures also conform to the five basic principles, with a progressively more stringent series of actions taken to meet the seriousness of the individual situation.

All behavior is assumed to be intentional. Detention after regular school hours is assigned for violation of rules. Detention time provides another opportunity for staff to interact with students to help correct behavior. A detention period may last as long as necessary, including overnight, to insure a total understanding of the reasons specific behavior is considered inappropriate. No student is taken

home from a detention period until he and the supervising staff have resolved the conflict and the student feels positive about himself.

Students suspected of possession of any drugs, alcohol, drug paraphernalia, matches, lighters or weapons will be searched by the staff. STRIVE's "time out" room is used to counter severe disruptive misbehavior which requires temporary removal from the group. "Time outs" are followed by an individual counseling session to get at the root cause of the behavior and assist the student in coping more appropriately with his feelings. Students are provided with opportunities to verbalize their anger and hostility to staff members under controlled conditions.

If all other measures have been exhausted, a non-compliant or uncontrollable student may be physically restrained by the STRIVE staff. The "take down" is used only in cases of behavior which may be dangerous to the student or others in the program, and only under carefully designed conditions. Staff members have been extensively trained in "take down" techniques and physical restraint to ensure that no student is injured. During the procedure, the student is also reassured and calmed by the staff. No "take down" ends until the student has regained his composure. A counseling session always follows a period of confrontation.

Since most of these youngsters are chronically truant from school, extensive measures are taken to assure 100% attendance among STRIVE students. Staff will, with parental permission, enter a home in the morning and firmly escort a reluctant youngster to the school bus. A student pleading illness will be checked by a staff member to insure that the illness is legitimate. If a student "disappears" from both home and school, a child find search is undertaken, involving both agency and law enforcement personnel. When found, that student is brought to school and -- whatever the time of day or night -- his regular school day begins and runs its full course.

Reintegration into the regular classroom setting is the ultimate goal of the STRIVE program. When a student has exhibited self-discipline and displayed significant improvement in behavior, he will be gradually reintegrated to a normal school



program, with ongoing counseling services provided to increase the chances of a successful transition.

The STRIVE philosophy is that behavior can be changed. Intervention can reverse the downward spiral that often ends in expensive, and too often ineffective, incarceration or institutional commitment. The program involves agencies and individuals from throughout the Sheboygan community in an intensive cooperative effort; committed to caring about these young people enough not to give up on them, **WHATEVER IT TAKES!**